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AUTHOR Gonzalez, Kenneth P.; Marin, Patricia
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Inside Doctoral Education in America:
Voices of Latinas/os in Pursuit of the Ph.D.

Kenneth P. González, San José State University

and

Patricia Marin, American Council on Education

with

Mark Figueroa, Claremont Graduate University; Jose F. Moreno, Harvard Graduate School of Education;
Christine Navia, University of Michigan; and Leonor Xochitl Perez, University of California Los Angeles

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Abstract

Based on the work of Paulo Freire (1970), this study employed dialogical research methods (Padilla, 1993) to reveal overt and hidden aspects of Latina/o doctoral student experiences. Six Latina/o doctoral students, representing various Research-I institutions, participated in the study. The design of the study included two phases. The first phase entailed the students constructing autobiographical narratives or poetry that described their doctoral experiences. Phase two involved utilizing the narratives and poetry to stimulate a dialogue among the participants about their experiences in the academy. According to Freire, dialogue is a moment of praxis which enables individuals to achieve critical consciousness of their everyday realities. The dialogue segment of the findings is presented here, highlighting the critical consciousness achieved by the research participants. The critical consciousness achieved by the students involved: (a) the problematic nature of the academy, (b) the forces perpetuating the academy's nature, and (c) an alternative framework for doctoral education.

Inside Doctoral Education in America:
Voices of Latinas/os in Pursuit of the Ph.D.

Since the granting of the first Ph.D. in the United States in 1861, doctoral education has become the centerpiece of American higher education. There is little doubt that the formation and success of doctoral programs has made American research universities the best in the world (Clark, 1995). The contributions of American research universities to society have been massive. From the advances in the field of child development to the evolution of gene therapy, the American research university has greatly influenced the lives and times of many.

Despite the historical status and contributions of graduate education in the U.S., the doctoral degree has recently become a target of controversy and reform (Geiger, 1997). Dispute over doctoral education largely concerns issues of time-to-degree (Anderson, 1998; Baird, 1993; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992), relevance and response to national needs (Atwell, 1996), demand for new faculty (Messy & Goldman, 1995), and training of highly specialized researchers (Boyer, 1990).

Before any viable reform effort can be achieved, however, an inventory of every key stakeholder must be conducted. Unfortunately, most of what is known about doctoral education ignores the doctoral student as stakeholder (Anderson, 1998). Far more often, the literature responds to the concerns of faculty members, academic institutions, the federal government, private foundations, and more recently, for-profit corporations. By comparison, only a limited knowledge base exists concerning the experiences of students in pursuit of the doctorate (Anderson, 1998; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Goodchild, Green, Katz, & Kluever, 1997). It is this limitation that provided motivation for the current study.

The purpose of this study was to bring to the forefront the voices of Latina/o doctoral students in the process of attaining a Ph.D. The study focuses on Latina/o doctoral students for a number of reasons. First, the presence of Latinas/os in doctoral programs remains sparse (Wilds, 2000). Second, the knowledge base concerning the experiences of Latina/o doctoral students is scant (Solorzano, 1998). Finally, the authors concur with Hefferlin (1969) who argued that the

greatest source for institutional reform lies in those who have been placed on the margins, in this case Latinas/os. To provide context for the research study, the literature concerning Latina/o doctoral students follows.

Latinas/os in Doctoral Education

It was not until the 1970s with the influence of the Civil Rights Movement that Latinas/os began to graduate from doctoral programs in notable numbers (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). Since that time, the proportion of Latinas/os earning doctorates has increased only slightly. For example, in a twenty-year span from 1976 to 1996, the proportion of Latinas/os earning a doctorate increased by only 2.2 percent -- from 1.3 percent in 1976 to 3.5 percent in 1996 (National Research Council, 1998). The small increase in the proportion of Latina/o doctorates is in stark contrast to the rapid growth of the Latina/o population in the U.S. For instance, between 1976 and 1996 the population of Latinas/os in the U.S. increased by 6.9 percent -- from 4.1 percent in 1976 to 11 percent in 1996 (United States Census, 1999).

Compounding the dismal representation of Latinas/os earning doctorates in the United States is a small literature base describing the experiences of Latinas/os in doctoral programs. At present, only a handful of studies have been published on this topic. Patricia Gandara (1982, 1993, 1995) was one of the first scholars to examine the experiences of Chicanas/os who attained a terminal degree. Her work was unique in that it isolated factors that contributed to the students' high educational achievement. Gandara interviewed 45 Chicanas/os who attained a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. during the 1970s. Gandara found that strong emotional support, particularly from their mothers, in addition to attending highly integrated schools, were critical to the students' success. Gloria Cuadraz (1992, 1993) also examined the educational experiences of Chicanas/os in doctoral programs during the 1970s. Her sample included 17 Chicanas and 23 Chicanos who had enrolled in a social science doctoral program at the University of California, Berkeley. Her study is important in that it examined students who had either graduated from or dropped-out of doctoral programs. Cuadraz employed the concept of marginality (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937) to

describe the experiences of Chicanas/os in American doctoral programs. In particular, Cuadraz (1992) found that Chicanas were marginalized as a result of their race, class, and gender.

Both Aida Morales (1988; Achor & Morales, 1990) and Daniel Solorzano (1993, 1998) investigated the experiences of Latinas/os who were enrolled in or graduated from doctoral programs during the 1980s. Morales' study of 100 Chicana doctorates in the field of education revealed critical strategies of resistance employed in the process of overcoming various institutional barriers. In particular, Morales found that students frequently challenged and rejected any underlying messages of their unworthiness. Solorzano's study of 66 Chicanas/os who had received Ford Foundation doctoral fellowships highlighted the role of racism and sexism in the process of attaining a doctorate. Specifically, Solorzano (1998) revealed the cumulative effect of race and gender microaggressions during this process.

Although each of the studies discussed uncovers important aspects of the Latina/o doctoral student experience, clearly additional research is needed. Moreover, since each study utilized samples from the 1970s and 1980s, it is unclear whether the existing research is relevant for current Latina/o doctoral students. Finally, every study but Solorzano's (1993, 1998) investigated Latinas/os who had already completed or dropped-out of doctoral education. Examining the experiences of Latinas/os in the process of attaining a doctorate would add further insights into potential areas for graduate program reform.

Research Design and Methods

As a means of contributing to the literature on Latina/o doctoral students, this study employed dialogical research methods (Padilla, 1993) based on the work of Paulo Freire (1970). Dialogical research relies on group discussion as the primary method for revealing overt and hidden aspects of problematic experiences in everyday life. As a consequence of group discussion, participants also may consider alternative social arrangements that could improve their lives (Padilla, 1993). In Freirian terms, dialogical research facilitates critical consciousness in the research participants. Critical consciousness, as defined by Freire, is a form of praxis and

involves learning to perceive the social, political, and economic barriers in everyday life which leads toward action against these oppressive elements.

Six Latina/o doctoral students in the field of education, representing various Research - I institutions across the country (Arizona State University, Claremont Graduate University, Harvard University, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Maryland, and the University of Michigan), participated in the study. At the time the data were collected each student was in the process of attaining a Ph.D. Most of the students were at the end of their course work, and a couple were in the early stages of the dissertation.

The design of the study included two phases. The first phase of the research design involved constructing autobiographical narratives or poetry that described Latina/o doctoral student experiences. The participants wrote their narratives during the fall of 1996. The use of narrative research methods (Bruner, 1990; Mitchell, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1988) in the first phase of the study was effective in capturing each individual's initial understandings of her or his doctoral experience.

Phase two of the research design involved utilizing the narratives and poetry to stimulate a dialogue among the participants about their experiences in the academy. According to Freire (1970), dialogue is a moment of praxis, or reflection and action; and it is through dialogue that individuals may achieve critical consciousness of society's everyday realities. Consequently, phase two involved each participant reading her/his narrative to the other research participants. In the sharing of each autobiographical account, the narratives were transformed into "stimulus objects," (Padilla, 1993) or tools to initiate a dialogue about their experiences as Latina/o doctoral students. The dialogue component of the research design occurred in the spring of 1997 and lasted approximately three hours. The dialogue was audiotaped and transcribed.

Data analysis occurred in two phases. Phase one involved analyzing and interpreting the students' individual narratives. Phase two involved analyzing and interpreting the ensuing dialogue. For both phases, inductive analysis was employed which allowed for categories, themes, and patterns to emerge from the data collected. The life of the study began with the

construction of narratives and ended with critical analysis or consciousness. The dialogue segment of the findings is presented here, highlighting the critical consciousness achieved by the research participants.

Findings

As the participants initiated the dialogue, a major shift occurred in how they understood their doctoral student experiences. While the construction of the narratives facilitated self-reflection, the dialogue served as a mechanism for collective problematizing of their experiences and the very context of the institution in which they found themselves: the academy. In short, this problem-posing, dialogical process enabled these doctoral students to achieve a critical consciousness about their experiences in the academy. Critical consciousness was achieved regarding: (a) the nature of the academy, (b) the forces perpetuating the academy's nature, and (c) an alternative framework for doctoral education.

The Nature of the Academy

As an outcome of their dialogue, the participants came to understand that what was problematic about their experiences was largely a result of the very nature of the academy. The participants discovered the nature of the academy to be conservative, restrictive, and racist. With each exchange the students began to peel away the academy's conservative, restrictive, and racist nature. A female doctoral student offered the following comment:

My problem is that we don't talk about how reductionist this whole endeavor is. We give a lot of play to the rhetoric that in academe you're free, any idea is valid, and everything should be challenged. And that's not the truth. The truth is when you get there you're supposed to claim allegiance. You're either going to do qualitative work, or you're going to do quantitative work. And you're either going to do stuff that will be accepted by a majority of people, or you're going to risk everything and do the "ethnic thing." It's just a series of these choices that nobody ever tells us...or that we don't really talk about very honestly.

Here, the student gives voice to the limited choices available to many of these Latina/o doctoral students. It was both disappointing and discouraging for these students to come up against such a conservative institution. Each participant shared how they felt betrayed by the academy's rhetoric of being open to any idea or possibility. The rhetoric, to their dismay, did not reflect the reality of academe's conservatism.

Another doctoral student described a similar frustration in the following way:

I think that if this is truly an academic community, anything I study should be valid – anything! And, you know, the fact that we have to fight...I just feel like this is a joke. Because whatever we study should be whatever we study. And as long as we're not reinventing the wheel or plagiarizing or any of that stuff we ought to be free to explore the things that interest us and that resonate with us. And sometimes I find it so...It's one of the most restrictive places to be.

In addition to the day-to-day challenges of becoming proficient in social science theory and research methodology, many of these students stated that they expended a great deal of energy fighting the restrictiveness of the academy. Most often, the academy's restrictive nature manifested itself during their choice of a research topic. It was a common, and often losing, battle for these students to explore research topics that resonated with their identities.

Many American institutions with conservative and restrictive natures engender racist and xenophobic behaviors. Conservative institutions, by definition, seek to conserve what exists as opposed to be open to what is different. Through dialogue, the students uncovered the academy's lack of openness to racial and ethnic differences. Three of the students offered the following example:

Female A: Another thing I don't understand...it's like there's a problem with the topics that we choose. And I think we should be more concerned about rigor, methodology, applicability, how parsimonious it is, and how can we generalize it to other things. I don't see it. I don't get it. This is what feels so racist to me about it, is that my dissertation on [Chicana/o] students in mariachi in higher ed and how

they change their environment could be done brilliantly. I don't get it. I don't understand why that's any different than if I did a study on white students in community colleges with the same methodology and the same brilliance. So what is it about a topic? I don't understand that.

Female B: Well, I think you named it right there. It's racism, period. That's huge. You can have someone who's grown up in Iowa do a study at Iowa college where they graduated. And that's their identity. That's what they know. That's their experience. And that's valid.

Male A: Completely valid.

Female B: That's cool. The Iowa experience. No questions asked. As soon as race enters as a factor, it becomes, you know, red lights. Hmm. "Is this important?" "Is this rigorous?"

As the conversation continued it became evident that many of the students were uncomfortable with the reality that some topics go unchallenged while others focusing on issues of race are scrutinized. Even when a topic involving race was successfully defended, the students commented that they routinely felt as if their topics were tokenized and deemed marginally important. Considering racism as a means to explain such circumstances was not simply a hasty reaction. On the contrary, the students initiated a critique of their own assessments of the situation. They considered the possibility of not articulating their positions effectively. They entertained the probability that methodological differences were at the root of such conflicts. In each instance, however, the students cited examples of other students investigating phenomena unrelated to race with less effective arguments and methodologies distinct from the expertise of their advisors. The students ended their lengthy debate with a consensus that no other interpretation possessed the explanatory power of racism.

Forces Perpetuating the Nature of the Academy

Further conversation shifted the participants' focus from the conservative, restrictive, and racist nature of the academy to the forces perpetuating this troublesome nature. The students

uncovered three perpetuating forces as a result of their dialogue. These forces are labeled: (a) the market culture, (b) elitism, and (c) faculty rewards and the tenure system.

The Market Culture. About half-way into the conversation, the students began to discuss the existence of a market culture in American research universities and its influence on doctoral education. For example, one of the students shared the following experience:

That's like my advisor and I, when we get into it, which we've unfortunately been doing a lot lately. She says, "What are you doing with this Latino stuff?" And I say, "How can you ask me that? You do the same thing." And she says, "Well, I just . . . I don't think it's going to serve you in the ways that you want it to; in ways that you ought to be served." And I say, "Well, what's the whole point of this? Is this for me to go out and get a job, to make myself marketable? Or is this actually about becoming a scholar and being able to explore any idea?" You know, there's a notion that what you study has to have some overarching, huge marketable profit to it. And if it doesn't, then it's not good enough.

As Latinas/os, many of the students wanted to explore topics that resonated with their ethnicity. They sought research topics that had intrinsic value to them. Working in a market culture, however, they received uncompromising messages that their topics had to be chosen primarily on an extrinsic and material basis. In many instances, these messages were delivered by someone highly influential, such as a faculty advisor.

Two students considered how editorial boards serve as one mechanism for perpetuating the market culture of the academy. They stated:

Male A: I wanted to kind of piggyback on what Female A said, and I actually think of it as scary. I'm trying to figure out why your advisor said, "Why are you doing this Latino stuff?" And I'm trying to figure her out. She's a young, bullet of a professor. And she sits on editorial boards, right? And those editorial boards, say, "Okay, we did our diversity stuff last year." And members of editorial boards serve for two or three years discussing, "This is the kind of work that we want to

see published." And so she's seen that. The scary part about that is that it's research for notoriety. It's research for reputation. And that's what it's all about. And in her mind-set, I think she represents the very core of the academy that's just about reputation, publishing, and being at the best research institution. And so if she wants to be the best, then there are certain topics that need to be done. In other words, if you do these topics, then you're going to be the best. And if she wants to be known as the best, she needs to get her students to be doing those certain topics. It's like a machine. And that's the scary part about it...especially in these large elite institutions. And so I think that plays out on us when we talk about our dissertation topics. There's this whole other world going on out there. And the implications of that world ends up being played out on us in some ways. But you've (to female B) had kind of a different experience, because you've had support from your institution. But I think it's support with them thinking that there would be some production.

Female B: There's a payoff for them.

Male A: Yes, there's a payoff for them. But if there's not a payoff for them...and she definitely doesn't think there's a payoff for you (to female A). And if it's not a payoff for you, it's not a payoff for her.

Much of the dialogue that occurred was sobering. It was sobering for the students to name the various forces pressuring individuals to act in certain ways. Editorial boards were identified as one powerful force perpetuating the status quo -- in this case, the academy's market culture. It was this kind of status quo mechanism that discouraged these students from pursuing topics that resonated with their identities.

Elitism. Besides the market culture, the students discovered that elitism, manifested in the form of individual and institutional obsessions with prestige and status, also reinforces the academy's restrictive, conservative, and racist nature. Two students highlight how faculty preoccupation with prestige and status restricted their personal interests and goals:

Female A: Oh, our faculty, they wouldn't even, they would die. Our faculty won't write you job recommendations for institutions that they don't deem worthy enough...regardless of what you're personal plans are, you're goals or whatever. If that institution is not a top tier institution, you can just forget it. Everybody knows that. And it's just ridiculous.

Female B: I think I've gotten a little bit of that from my advisor as well. I had to fight for a few things this summer. I applied for two things, and she just doesn't think that they're worth my time. She said "Why do you want to go there?" There's that minority fellowship I was interested in. She said, "Well, what do you want from that?" I replied, "Well, some mentorship, some socialization." Because at the last minute I decided I just may consider some faculty positions. She said, "Well you can get that here. You don't have to go there." And then I applied for this research methodology seminar that focuses on the Latino experience. She didn't support that either. I pursued it anyway. And she said she would write a letter of recommendation, but I had to write my own letter. I had to type my own letter while her secretary was sitting there watching me. Her secretary was sitting there gabbing, just talking away with this guy. And I was sitting there sweating it, typing my own letter. She made it so obvious that she's not using her resources to support something that she's completely against. And that was really hard for me.

It was difficult for these students to accept the kind of power their faculty advisors had over them. In both explicit and subtle ways, they received messages that their choices were limited. In many instances, they felt boxed in and set on a path that is always mindful of prestige, status, and fame. It was this kind of path that, in many instances, precluded them from connecting their intellectual work with their personal goals.

In addition to restricting the students' personal interests, preoccupation with prestige and status also discouraged them from pursuing their political goals. For example, one of the students confronted the group with the following reality check:

Male A: If there was a Latino institution that was dedicated to developing scholars, young scholars...and faculty had the opportunity to put their research into practice to effect change for Latino communities. But, there was no glory or fame that came with that position -- would you take it? That's exactly how I think. Here's another scenario. What if my daughter was accepted to Stanford, and had the choice of going to Stanford or a Latino-type of university that I worked at? Would I tell her, "Hey, I think my institution is better for you"? That's a reality check. Other people say, "Well, my kid was accepted to such and such, but they wanted to go to Stanford, they wanted to go to Yale." And they didn't stand up for the kind of institution where they knew that their kid is going to be nurtured. Instead, they wanted them to go with the fame and the glory. How do we get past that? That's a reality I struggle with. I mean, you talk to other people that have an opportunity to go to a place where they are going to do the work they want to do, that's going to make a difference. Or, they can go and take a faculty position somewhere else that's going to give them legitimacy and status in the academy. Where do they go? That's a hard call to make -- especially after you have put all your time into getting that piece of paper.

As the student finished, the group paused for a moment, contemplating the various scenarios that they heard. A few of the students admitted that, prior to this occasion, they were not fully mindful of how they are consistently socialized to accept the values of prestige and status. They all agreed that such values are at the core of American higher education institutions, and consequently restrict their desire and ability to effect social change. The students wondered to what extent they have internalized the values of prestige and status, and how they would ward off further internalization.

Faculty Rewards and The Tenure System. In addition to the market culture and elitism, the students analyzed the role of tenure in perpetuating a restrictive and conservative academy. Two student discussed the role of tenure in the following way:

Male C: The point you made about your advisor makes me think about some of the Latino faculty that I've been talking to. They say, "Well as soon as you get tenure then you can do whatever you want."

Female C: Yeah, and I think, that's seven years, you know? I mean...I don't know...I just can't accept that.

It was difficult for many of the students to accept the message that "after tenure, you can do what you want." They asked, "Why do we have to wait until we receive tenure?" The students wondered what it was about the tenure system that limited their current options. Such questions had paralyzing effects and forced many of the students to question if the academy was the place where they truly wanted to work.

Two students offer another example of the constraining effects of the tenure system:

Male A: What's amazing to me is how it all begins with incentives and the faculty rewards structure. And I never thought about that before. It kind of trickles all the way down to us -- that until we change the tenure system and how faculty are getting rewarded and earning tenure, then we are going to continue experiencing what we are experiencing. I talked about being a faculty member that not only does research, but actually does practice and creates some kind of program. That's the kind of faculty member I want to be, where I could actually see the results of having some impact in my own community. I want to be able to turn and look and shake the hand of someone who's participated in a program that I created to help them based on the research that I did. But that's not the way it works. The rewards structure is not built for that -- never created for that.

Female B: No. There's no incentive for actually changing something. It goes back to the point I made earlier. Sometimes I look at the stuff that's being done, and I think, "You know, you're challenging me about my decisions to help institutions make themselves more diverse, and to do some creative problem-solving. And I get the fifth degree for that." And I think, "And you sit and you write about how

somebody decides whether or not to include this book in their curriculum. And it hasn't changed anything. It's not like you've opened up the curriculum. It's not like you've given new people a role. I mean, things go on, and the world just keeps turning. And nothing significant happens. No one's getting greater access, no one's having a better experience. All the things that we consider part of educational success -- they're not happening. Everything's going backwards." And so I get upset at the fact that I'm held to a higher standard than I feel they hold themselves to, in a lot of ways. It's that inherent sort of hypocritical standard.

This verbal exchange illuminates the power of the tenure system as it is experienced at the level of the doctoral student. Specifically, the students highlight how the current reward structure determines to a great extent what is or is not acceptable behavior in the academy. Consequently, the students perceived no real incentive to effect practical change. On the contrary, they learned the hard way that any activity outside of the faculty reward structure is open to reprove.

Up to this point, the discussion was successful in revealing the problematic aspects of their doctoral student experiences. The students revealed not only their primary obstacle, namely the current nature of the academy, but also the forces that perpetuate this nature. In Freirian terms, the group had named their world -- a conservative, restrictive, and racist world. Acquiescing to the forces preserving this world would limit the students to: (a) choose only those research topics that have market value, (b) work from an elitist framework, and (c) participate only in those activities that are rewarded by the tenure system. Moreover, acquiescing to these forces would engender a fragmented existence -- one that separates their intellectual identities from their ethnic and political identities.

An Alternative Framework for Doctoral Education

Fortunately, the process of dialogue also enabled the participants to consider alternative social arrangements that could improve their lives. As the conversation entered its third hour, the participants opened-up the possibilities of a new form of doctoral education and academic life -- one that integrates who they are ethnically, politically, and intellectually¹. A sense of excitement

and passion permeated the room as the group articulated the connections between these three integral parts of their identities. For example, one of the students highlighted the connection between his intellectual focus on education and his experiences as a Latino in the U.S. He stated:

Male A: I think a lot of the reasons why we're all here in doctoral programs studying education has a lot to do with race and class issues. And I think, if I didn't come from a marginalized group then I would be interested in things other than education. If I wasn't thinking about or experiencing social oppression I'd be thinking, "hmm, look at those stars out there. I wonder how they work?" And I would probably be studying astronomy or something. For example, I was watching the movie Jaws the other day. And you have this guy who goes out to the ocean, fascinated with sharks, and chooses a career in studying sharks. Why? Because he was almost bitten by a shark when he was a kid. I might get bitten by a shark, but I'd still have to come back and deal with discrimination, racism, and classism which, unfortunately, has priority over the shark bite. Where this guy, he has a shark bite, and that's what he studies for the rest of his life, you know?

As the student concluded his comment, the group agreed that what motivated them to enter a doctoral program and focus on education was deeply connected to their ethnic backgrounds. Their ethnicity was a primary source of motivation -- one which they sought to nourish and incorporate into their intellectual work. When the students spoke of passion, it was a passion rooted in who they are ethnically and their experiences as members of a marginalized group in America.

The strong connection between the students' intellectual, political, and ethnic identities also was manifested in an inherent sense of obligation to improve the social conditions of the Latina/o community. A female student articulated this connection in the following way:

Female C: Why we are here and what we want is based on who we are. We're survivors. We made it. We're in a position that very few of our people obtain to this level. So I think that in many ways, we carry the weight of our whole race on our back, and we feel responsible. In my narrative, I talked about feeling guilty

about my privilege. So now I feel like I made it and now I have to give back. It's just too much for me to indulge in this on my own because I'm in a position where I can actually do something to make a difference for so many people.

Part of who these students are involves a relationship between the educational level they have achieved and the lack of educational success experienced by the majority of Latinas/os in the U.S. These students are continuously aware that the doors of opportunity that are now open to them are closed for many Latinas/os. The students stated that they cannot ignore the situation nor do they wish to do so. A radical sense of democracy has permeated their perspective of the world because of their membership in a marginalized group. Consequently, any considerations of giving up their mission for social equality simply to be successful in the academy was unsettling. The students were unwavering in their avowal that their presence in doctoral education did not solely concern intellectual stimulation. This point was made in the following exchange:

Female A: We have a unique conviction for social change because it is a need that is connected to a socioeconomic, political situation that our group, our race is dealing with. And I think that is where the anger comes in, when we discuss these issues just to have intellectual stimulation and where these people can stop talking about these issues and go to dinner, and go on. They can enter and leave this whenever they want. We don't get the luxury of entering and leaving. They can sit there and intellectualize it, but when they're done they go home. And when I'm done, I don't get to detach from that.

Male A: It doesn't shut off when you walk out the door.

Male B: Yes, it happened in that classroom. I'm in the class and you could see it in the faces of some of my classmates. They were like "oh, this is fun." And they are talking about something that's affecting my people, and it's just fun for them. And it's like...

Female B: Recreational.

Male B: Yeah, such a recreational thing. I think the academy facilitates and perpetuates that kind of situation. The academy wants that kind of environment where students can smile and laugh and be happy about their ideas. I mean the epitome of the academy is intellectual stimulation. And here we are wanting more than intellectual stimulation.

Female B: It's not about recreation for us its about social change.

The students assumed two responsibilities in pursuing a Ph.D. The first responsibility was to become independent scholars. The second involved creating a form of scholarship that would positively affect the social conditions of their communities. They did not view the second responsibility as overly burdensome, however. On the contrary, the connection between their intellectual work and their desires to affect social change was seen as synergistic. A student made this point as he stated:

I don't think anybody can say anything really significant unless it is truly about who they are at their core. That's when I think these wonderful ideas are created, because it's about them as well as it is about who they are researching. And so I think the really great stuff from me, from you, from anybody, is what comes from your core. And in our case, that core concerns our ethnicity and experiences of being from a marginalized group.

Here, the student highlighted the benefits of connecting intellectual work with personal identity. In doing so, he both validated personal experience as a important resource for the creation of new ideas, and provided additional support for a doctoral student model that integrates one's ethnic, political, and intellectual identities.

As the discussion concluded, the group achieved consensus that their vision of doctoral education not only made sense, but also was necessary to their well being. For a moment, the students questioned the viability of living this model of academic life, as well as reforming the existing model. They reflected on the work of their predecessors and the sacrifices those individuals made to succeed in the academy. The students agreed that they did not need nor want

to continue making such sacrifices. Two students ended the discussion with the following statement:

Male A: I think the evolution is that they had to play that role, they had to do whatever it took to make it in the academy. They had to prove that they belonged here. They had to prove certain things. The reasons why they did certain things and reacted in certain ways was because the institutions felt that they couldn't cut it. So, they had to show them that they could cut it, and they could be like them. So, they had to work from the White institution's values. Now, what I get from what we're saying is that our generation is saying no. Now, it's a negotiation. You have to work from some of our community's values now and you have to work with us.

Male B: I think the fact that they made those sacrifices was a way to set us up to be in a position to say "hey, it's our turn. Now we are going to do it by our rules and not yours."

The process of reform requires both a critique of what presently exists, as well as the construction of an alternative model to take its place. Through dialogue, the students were able to achieve both tasks. They commented that they felt empowered as a result of the dialogue. They had learned much about themselves and their environment. They also viewed the work and sacrifices of their predecessors as paramount to their existence in doctoral education. They believed the efforts and sacrifices of their predecessors have enabled them to work from a new vantage point and take action toward a new reality for themselves, their communities, and future Latina/o academics.

Summary and Discussion

As has been suggested, it is important to include the perspectives of all stakeholders in the reform process. This study responds to the interests of the doctoral student. In particular, the study highlights the viewpoint of a group of Latinas/os concerning their doctoral student experiences. From their perspective, doctoral education in America entails negotiating a restrictive, conservative, and racist institution and the forces that perpetuate it. Specifically, the students

denounce the perpetuation of a market culture, elitism, and the current form of the faculty reward structure and tenure system. Additionally, they argue that the continuation of these forces preserves a restrictive, conservative, and racist institution which, consequently, fragments integral parts of their identities. Over and above their condemnation, the students propose an alternative reality of doctoral education -- one that supports and validates the interconnectedness of their ethnic, political, and intellectual identities. In total, the study cultivated a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Latinas/os in doctoral programs as well as potential areas for reform. Such an understanding is critical for both research and practice.

With regard to research, the study supports the existing literature on Latina/o doctoral students. In particular, the findings uphold the work of Cuadraz (1992, 1993), Morales (1988; Achor & Morales, 1990), and Solorzano (1993, 1998) who found that race and ethnicity play an important role in the experiences of Latina/o doctoral students. In the case of the students in this study, their ethnicity was at the root of their doctoral experience. The students viewed their ethnicity as not only a primary source of motivation to study education, but also as a means to address the needs of the Latina/o community.

Beyond the support of existing research, the study extends the prevailing literature in both method and content. First, unlike traditional research, the participants in this study were not simply describing their experiences -- they were making sense of them. In other words, the students were participating in a process of critical reflection that engendered critical consciousness. As a result, the students walked away from the study with new knowledge about themselves, their environment, and possible alternative social arrangements. The new knowledge these students constructed not only benefited them, but also those who wish to better understand Latina/o doctoral students. In particular, the participants brought to the forefront the current nature of the academy as they experienced it. Moreover, the students illuminated their perceptions of the very forces that perpetuate the academy's troublesome nature. Finally, the students propose an alternative model of doctoral education.

With regard to practice, the findings of the study point to areas of reform at both the institutional and individual level. Institutions seeking to increase the representation of Latina/o doctoral students need to reexamine the relationship between their rhetoric and the actual experiences of students in their programs. Instead of proclaiming the support of any idea or possibility, institutions need to confront the various ways in which they are restrictive and conservative. In particular, institutions need to consider how the market culture, elitism, and the current faculty rewards structure limit and constrain potential areas of inquiry. Finally, institutions need to take heed of the finding that these Latina/o students felt they were living a fragmented existence. Students' ethnicity and politics should not be something to remove from doctoral training, but rather something to incorporate.

In addition to institutional reform, the findings of the study suggest change for individuals. Faculty members, in their roles as advisors, teachers, and mentors need to be aware of the perspectives and realities of Latina/o doctoral students. If faculty members want to support such students, they need to be more sensitive to the various ways of promoting their success. For example, faculty can encourage valid research topics that resonate with a student's ethnicity and politics. Faculty members also can be supportive by validating nontraditional career goals and paths.

Finally, the findings of the study also may be relevant to the decisions and actions of current and future doctoral students. As neophytes placed in a context of intense socialization, current doctoral students may resist the internalization of the forces perpetuating the academy's conservative, restrictive, and racist nature by choosing research topics and engaging in activities that are meaningful to them regardless of their market value, prestige, or reward by the current form of the faculty tenure system. With regard to future doctoral students, choosing the best institution may have more to do with the support and validation of the interconnectedness of their identities than the attractiveness of a generous financial aid package, the prestige of an institution, or the presence of a distinguished professor.

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Footnote

¹ The ideas for this model stem from the work of the teaching community, headed by Dr. Eileen de los Reyes, for a course at the Harvard Graduate School of Education titled, "T-128: Education for Political and Social Change". Developed in the context of teaching and research, this model examines the interconnectedness of one's personal, political, and intellectual identities and their influence on one's work.